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ABSTRACT

The forms of abuse that animals are subjected to are similar to the forms of abuse children experience, such as physical abuse, serious neglect, and psychological abuse. This document describes psychiatric, psychological, and criminal research linking animal abuse to violence perpetrated by juveniles and adults. Particular attention is given to the prevalence of cruelty to animals by children and adolescents and to the role of animal abuse as a possible symptom of conduct disorders. It reviews the motivations and etiology underlying the maltreatment of animals. The importance of including information about animal abuse in the assessment of youth at-risk of committing interpersonal violence is emphasized throughout the publication. Recommendations are included on how to curb animal cruelty. A list of resources is included for additional information. (Contains 90 references.) (JDM)

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OJJDP

September 2001

JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

Animal Abuse and Youth Violence

Frank R. Ascione

The past two decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the relation between cruelty to animals, or animal abuse, and serious violent behavior, especially among youthful offenders. As an illustration, a recent study by Verlinden (2000) of 9 school shootings in the United States (from Moses Lake, WA, in 1996 to Conyers, GA, in 1999) reported that 5 (45 percent) of the 11 perpetrators had histories of alleged animal abuse. The most well-documented example was the case of Luke Woodham who, in the April before his October 1997 murder of his mother and two schoolmates, tortured and killed his own pet dog (Ascione, 1999).

This Bulletin reports on the psychiatric, psychological, and criminological research linking animal abuse to juvenile- and adult-perpetrated violence. It addresses the challenge of defining animal abuse and examines the difficulty of deriving accurate incidence and prevalence data for this behavior. It also explores the relationships between animal abuse and conduct disorder (CD), analyzes the motives of child and adolescent animal abusers, and considers the contexts that may lead to the emergence of animal abuse as a symptom of psychological disorder. (Although a few studies examine the neurobiological correlates of cruelty to animals—see Lockwood and Ascione, 1998—that topic is beyond the scope of this review.) The importance of including information about animal abuse in assessments of youth at risk of committing interpersonal violence is emphasized throughout, and a list of national organizations with programs related to the link between animal abuse and other violent behavior is also provided.

This Bulletin does not suggest that attending to animal abuse is a panacea for dealing with the challenges of identifying and addressing youth violence. Violent behavior is multidimensional and multidetermined, and its developmental course is still the subject of concerted research investigation (Moffitt, 1997). However, it is argued here that animal abuse has received insufficient attention—in fact, is sometimes explicitly excluded (e.g., Stone and Kelner, 2000)—as one of a number of "red flags," warning signs, or sentinel behaviors that could help identify youth at risk for perpetrating interpersonal violence (a relation first noted in the psychiatric literature by Pinel in 1809) and youth who have themselves been victimized.

Defining Animal Abuse

All 50 States have legislation relating to animal abuse. Most States categorize it as a misdemeanor offense, and 30 States also have instituted felony-level statutes for certain forms of cruelty to animals. However, legal definitions of animal abuse, and even the types of animals that are covered by these statutes, differ from State to State (Ascione and Lockwood, 2001; Frasch et al., 1999; Lacroix, 1998). The research literature also fails to yield a consistent definition of animal abuse or cruelty to

A Message From OJJDP

Although legal definitions of animal abuse vary, it is a crime in every State, and many States have enacted laws establishing certain forms of cruelty to animals as felony offenses. The forms of abuse to which animals may be subjected are similar to the forms of abuse children experience, including physical abuse, serious neglect, and even psychological abuse.

It has been said that violence begets violence, but what do we know about the nature of the relationship between the abuse of animals and aggressive behavior towards human beings?

This Bulletin describes psychiatric, psychological, and criminal research linking animal abuse to violence perpetrated by juveniles and adults.

Particular attention is focused on the prevalence of cruelty to animals by children and adolescents and to the role of animal abuse as a possible symptom of conduct disorder. In addition, the motivations and etiology underlying the maltreatment of animals are thoroughly reviewed.

The abuse of sentient creatures demands our attention. The Bulletin includes recommendations to curb such cruelty, while providing contact information for additional resources concerned with violence perpetrated against animals and people.

It is our hope that the information that this Bulletin offers will contribute to reducing both forms of violence.

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animals; however, the following definition captures features common to most attempts to define this behavior: "socially unacceptable behavior that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to and/or death of an animal" (Ascione, 1993:228).

This definition excludes practices that may cause harm to animals yet are socially condoned (e.g., legal hunting, certain agricultural and veterinary practices). Because the status of a particular animal may vary from one culture to another, the definition takes into account the social contexts that help determine what is considered animal abuse. For the purposes of this review, the animals that are victims of abuse are most often vertebrates because this is the category of animals to which are attributed the greatest capacity for experiencing and displaying pain and distress.

The forms of abuse to which animals may be subjected are parallel to the forms of child maltreatment. Animals may be physically or sexually abused, may be seriously neglected, and, some might argue, may be psychologically abused.

Prevalence of Cruelty to Animals by Children and Adolescents

Because cruelty to animals is not monitored systematically in national crime reporting systems (Howard Snyder, personal communication, January 22, 2001), researchers must rely on data from studies in developmental psychology and psychopathology to estimate the prevalence of this problem behavior in samples of youth. A number of assessment instruments that address child behavior problems include a question about cruelty to animals. However, "cruelty" is not always explicitly defined for the respondent, so it is difficult to determine the exact behaviors that are being reported.

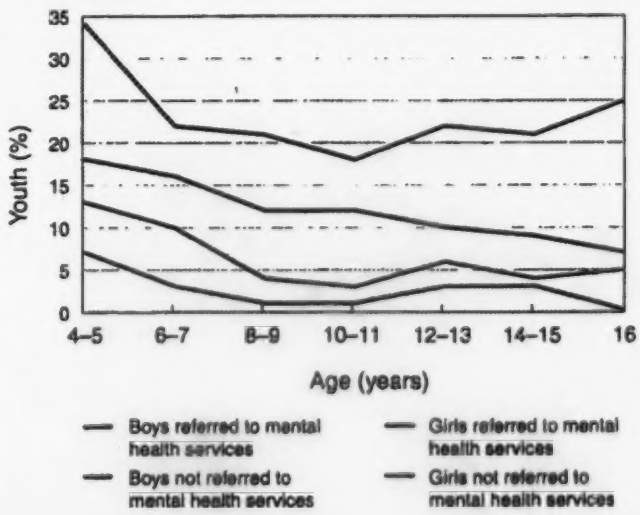
Using the Achenbach-Conners-Quay Behavior Checklist (ACQ), Achenbach and colleagues (1991) collected parent or guardian reports of problem behaviors for 2,600 boys and girls ages 4 to 16 who had been referred to mental health clinics and a control group of 2,600 boys and girls of the same age. The nonreferred children constituted a representative sample of the U.S. population, based on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and place of residence (urban/suburban/rural and national region [e.g., Northeast, West]). These children had been screened for the absence of mental health referrals in the past year. The referred children were drawn from 18 mental health clinics across the United States. Most of the referred children were being evaluated for outpatient mental health services. Potential candidates for inclusion in the nonreferred and referred groups were excluded if they were mentally retarded, had a serious physical illness, or had a handicap.

One item on the ACQ asks the respondent whether their child or adolescent has been "cruel to animals" in the past 2 months. Respondents can answer using the following 4-point scale: 0 = never or not at all true (as far as you know), 1 = once in a while or just a little, 2 = quite often or quite a lot, or 3 = very often or very much. Figure 1 shows the percentage of caregivers, for each age group, gender, and referral status, that reported the presence of cruelty to animals (David Jacobowitz, Statistician Programmer, Achenbach System for Empirical Behavioral Assessment, College of Medicine, University of Vermont, personal communication, July 17, 1992). In their statistical analysis of individual ACQ items, Achenbach and colleagues noted that cruelty to animals was significantly ($p<0.01$) higher for referred youth, boys, and younger children.

The data in figure 1 illustrate the relatively low frequency of cruelty to animals in the nonreferred sample (0–13 percent) in comparison with the referred sample (7–34 percent). Eighteen to twenty-five percent of referred boys between the ages of 6 and 16 were reported to have been cruel to animals, and the data suggest this item's incidence has greater stability through childhood and adolescence for boys than for girls.

Data on the prevalence of cruelty to animals are also provided in the manuals for the Child Behavior Checklist (CBC), perhaps one of the most widely used checklists for child behavior problems, which is available in separate versions for 2- to 3-year-olds (Achenbach, 1992) and 4- to 18-year-olds (Achenbach, 1991). The cruelty

Figure 1: Percentage of Youth Reported by Caregivers To Have Been Cruel to Animals, by Offender's Age, Gender, and Referral Status



Note: Data show caregivers' responses to a question asking whether their child or adolescent had been cruel to animals in the past 2 months.

Source: Achenbach, T.M., Howell, C.T., Quay, H.C., and Conners, C.K. 1991. National survey of problems and competencies among four- to sixteen-year-olds. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 56: Serial No. 255.

to animals item on the CBC (which uses a "past 2 months" timeframe for 2- to 3-year-olds and a "past 6 months" timeframe for 4- to 18-year-olds) is scored on a 3-point scale: 0 = not true (as far as you know), 1 = somewhat or sometimes true, or 2 = very true or often true. Referred and nonreferred boys and girls can be compared for each of three age groups. These data are presented in figure 2. In this figure, data on acts of vandalism committed by the two older age groups are included for comparison. Again, cruelty to animals is more often reported for younger children and boys, especially those referred for mental health services. Figure 2 also suggests that reported rates of cruelty to animals (for youth ages 4 and older) are higher than or similar to reported rates of vandalism, a problem behavior about which more systematic juvenile crime data are available.[1]

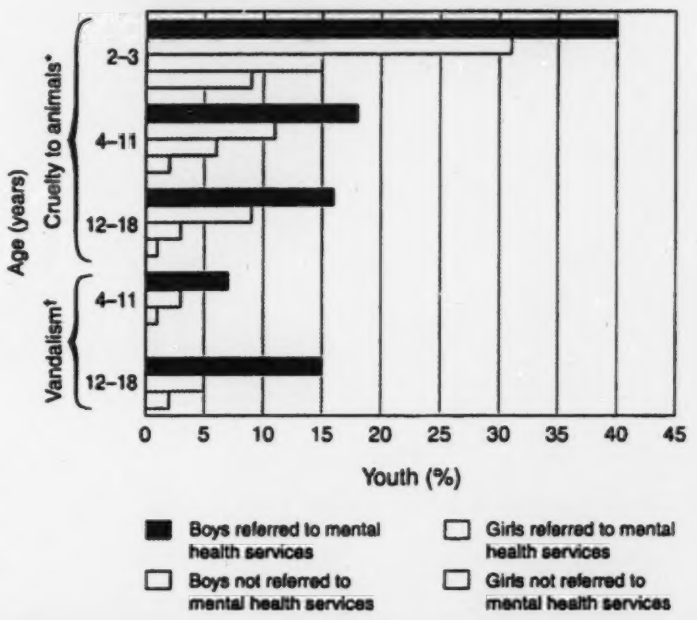
Limitations of Adult Reports on Children's Cruelty to Animals

Both the ACQ and CBC rely on caretakers' reports, and comparable information from youth's self-reports of cruelty to animals is not available. The reliance on caretakers' reports, however, could be problematic because animal abuse may be performed covertly (a characteristic shared with youth vandalism and firesetting) and caretakers may be unaware of the presence of this behavior in their children. Offord, Boyle, and Racine (1991) surveyed a nonclinical sample of 1,232 Canadian parents/guardians and their 12- to 16-year-old boys and girls. They asked respondents (both parents/guardians and adolescents) to report on a number of CD symptoms, based on a 3-point scale identical to the one used with the CBC. (See pages 4–5 for a more indepth discussion of the link between CD and animal abuse.) Figure 3 compares parent/guardian reports of cruelty to animals with youth self-reports. These data suggest that parents and guardians may seriously underestimate cruelty to animals, with boys self-reporting this behavior at 3.8 times the rate of parents/guardians and girls at 7.6 times the parent/guardian rate. Similar underestimates appear for two other CD symptoms, vandalism and firesetting, that may often be covert and, therefore, unknown to or undetected by parents or guardians (see figure 4).

A recent study of a nonclinical sample of youth (1,333 boys and 837 girls; mean age, 14.6 years) in Alexandria, Egypt (Youssef, Attia, and Kamel, 1999), also provides data on self-reported cruelty to animals. Dividing their sample into two groups—one reporting that they had engaged in violent behavior (acts of "physical force that tended to inflict harm or cause bodily injury") and the other reporting that they had not—Youssef, Attia, and Kamel (1999:284) asked youth whether they were often cruel to animals. Of the violent youth, 9.6 percent reported being cruel; of the nonviolent youth, 2.05 percent reported being cruel. The cruelty-to-animals variable significantly ($p<0.003$) determined membership in the violent or nonviolent group.

It should be noted that instruments used to assess teacher reports of children's problem behaviors rarely include an item on animal abuse (e.g., Reynolds and Kamphaus, 1992). Although teachers are unlikely to observe their pupils being cruel to animals, teachers may hear about such acts or read about them in students' written work. These indirect observations should be taken seriously and serve as a signal for further assessment (Dwyer, Osher, and Warger, 1998).

Figure 2: Comparison of Reports of Incidents of Cruelty to Animals and Incidents of Vandalism, by Offender's Age, Gender, and Referral Status



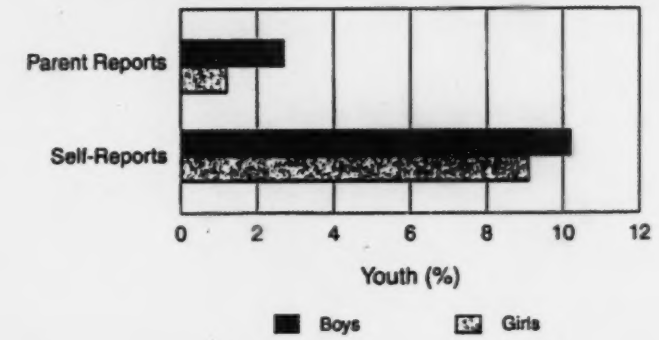
* In the past 2 months for children ages 2–3; in the past 6 months for children ages 4–18.
† The percentage for girls not referred to mental health services was zero for both age groups.

Sources: Achenbach, T.M. 1992. *Manual for the Child Behavior Checklist/2–3 and 1992 Profile.* Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, Department of Psychiatry. Achenbach, T.M. 1991. *Manual for the Child Behavior Checklist/4–18 and 1991 Profile.* Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, Department of Psychiatry.

Animal Abuse and Violent Offending

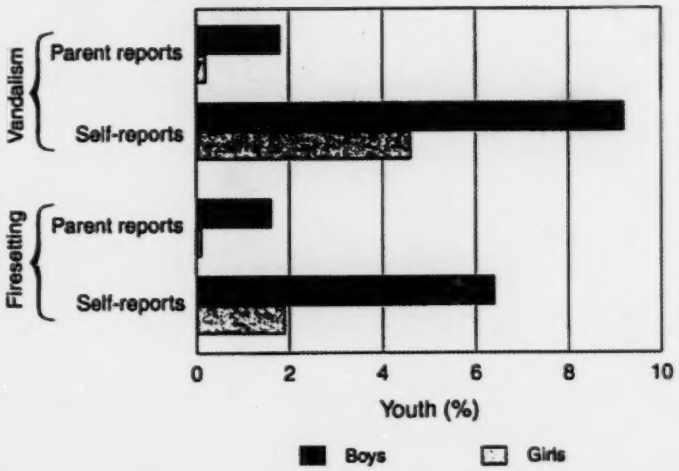
Animal abuse and interpersonal violence toward humans share common characteristics: both types of victims are living creatures, have a capacity for experiencing pain and distress, can display physical signs of their pain and distress (with which humans could empathize), and may die as a result of inflicted injuries. Given these commonalities, it is not surprising that early research in this area, much of it using retrospective assessment, examined

Figure 3: Comparison of Parental Reports and Self-Reports of Cruelty to Animals Among 12- to 16-Year-Olds, by Offender's Gender



Source: Offord, D.R., Boyle, M.H., and Racine, Y.A. 1991. The epidemiology of antisocial behavior in childhood and adolescence. In *The Development and Treatment of Childhood Aggression*, edited by D.J. Pepler and K.H. Rubin. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 31–54. This figure was derived from table 2.3, p. 39.

Figure 4: Comparison of Parental Reports and Self-Reports of Vandalism and Firesetting Among 12- to 16-Year-Olds, by Offender's Gender



Source: Offord, D.R., Boyle, M.H., and Racine, Y.A. 1991. The epidemiology of antisocial behavior in childhood and adolescence. In *The Development and Treatment of Childhood Aggression*, edited by D.J. Pepler and K.H. Rubin. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, pp. 31–54.

the relation between childhood histories of animal abuse and later violent offending.

Kellert and Felthous (1985) found that violent, incarcerated men reported higher rates of "substantial cruelty to animals" in childhood (25 percent) than a comparison group of nonincarcerated men (0 percent). A similar difference emerged in a study of assaultive and nonassaultive women offenders (Felthous and Yudowitz, 1977): 36 percent of the former group reported cruelty to animals compared with 0 percent of the latter.

Miller and Knutson (1997) examined self-reports of animal abuse by 299 inmates incarcerated for various felony offenses and 308 introductory psychology class undergraduates.[3] The percentages of inmates and undergraduates, respectively, reporting the following types of animal abuse were as follows: "Hurt an animal?" 16.4 percent and 9.7 percent, "Killed a stray?" 32.8 percent and 14.3 percent, and "Killed a pet?" 12 percent and 3.2 percent.

More recently, Schiff, Louw, and Ascione (1999) surveyed 117 men incarcerated in a South African prison about their childhood animal abuse. Of the 58 men who had committed crimes of aggression, 63.3 percent admitted to cruelty to animals; of the 59 nonaggressive inmates, the percentage was 10.5 percent.

In a study of 28 convicted, incarcerated sexual homicide perpetrators (all men), Ressler, Burgess, and Douglas (1988) assessed the men's self-reports of cruelty to animals in childhood and adolescence. Childhood animal abuse was reported by 36 percent of the perpetrators, and 46 percent admitted to abusing animals as adolescents. Thirty-six percent of these men said they had also abused animals in adulthood. In a study by Tingle et al. (1986) of 64 convicted male sex offenders, animal abuse in childhood or adolescence was reported by 48 percent of the rapists and 30 percent of the child molesters.

Taken together, these studies suggest that animal abuse may be characteristic of the developmental histories of between one in four and nearly two in three violent adult offenders.

Animal Abuse and Conduct Disorder

The fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM–IV*) defines CD as "a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated" and requires that at least 3 of 15 separate symptoms be present in the past year for a diagnosis of CD (American Psychiatric Association, 1994:90). Among the symptoms listed are those categorized under "deceitfulness or theft," "destruction of property" (which encompasses firesetting and vandalism), and "aggression to

people and animals" (which includes cruelty to people or to animals, stealing with confrontation of the victim, and forced sexual activity). There is a great deal of overlap between the symptoms of CD and behaviors used to characterize serious violent juvenile offenders (see Loeber, Farrington, and Waschbusch, 1998:14–15). Cruelty to animals has only recently been included in the symptom list for CD, appearing for the first time in the revised third edition of the *Manual* (*DSM–III–R*; American Psychiatric Association, 1987). Cruelty to animals, however, does not specifically appear in any of the categories (i.e., person, property, drug, and public order) under which juvenile offenders are classified in national crime reporting systems (see Snyder and Sickmund, 1999) despite law enforcement's acknowledgment of the link between animal abuse and human violence (Lockwood and Church, 1996; Ponder and Lockwood, 2000; Schleuter, 1999; Turner, 2000).

Animal abuse may vary in frequency, severity, and chronicity and range from the developmentally immature teasing of animals (e.g., a toddler pulling a kitten along by the tail) to serious animal torture (e.g., stealing neighborhood pets and setting them on fire). Unfortunately, most assessments of cruelty to animals lack a scaling of these important differences. One exception is the Interview for Antisocial Behavior (IAB) developed by Kazdin and Esveldt-Dawson (1986). Although it was created before the 1987 revision of the *DSM*, this instrument assesses 30 forms of antisocial behavior, several of which reflect the current CD symptom listings (established in 1994). The IAB has a number of positive features, including both parent- and self-report forms and ratings of problem severity and chronicity.[3]

As illustrated in a study of psychiatric outpatient referrals by Loeber et al. (1993), patterns of chronic behavior may be more significant than isolated incidents. Three yearly assessments that included a question about cruelty to animals were completed with 177 boys ages 7–12 years, some of whom (40.1 percent) were diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) and others (38.4 percent) with CD. Single-year assessment of cruelty to animals did not differentiate boys with ODD from those with CD, but a significant difference emerged when scores on this item were aggregated over a 3-year period: cruelty to animals was present for 13.3 percent of boys with ODD and 29.4 percent of boys with CD ($p<0.05$).

Because of the interest in early identification of children at risk for later violent offending, it should be noted that cruelty to animals may be one of the first CD symptoms to appear in young children. Parents' reports on the emergence of CD symptoms in their children mark 6.5 years as the median age for onset of "hurting animals"—earlier than bullying, cruelty to people, vandalism, or setting fires (Frick et al., 1993). That study reinforces the importance of considering animal abuse a significant early warning sign for identifying youth with potential for receiving a CD diagnosis.[4] The diagnostic value of this symptom is also supported in a report by Spitzer, Davies, and Barkley (1990), which was based on national field trials for developing *DSM–III–R*.

Recently, Luk et al. (1999:30) reported a reanalysis of case data for a sample of children ($n=141$) referred to mental health services for "symptoms suggestive of oppositional defiant/conduct disorder" and control data for a sample of community children ($n=37$). The clinic-referred children were subdivided into two groups based on CBC assessments: cruelty to animals present ($n=40$) and absent ($n=101$). Therefore, 28.4 percent of the clinic-referred children displayed animal abuse. The community children were selected only if cruelty to animals was absent in their CBC assessments. Luk et al. demonstrated that differentiating the clinic-referred subgroups on the basis of cruelty to animals was related to scores on a measure of childhood behavior problems that, unlike the CBC, does not assess cruelty to animals—the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (Eyberg and Ross, 1978). The authors found that clinic-referred children assessed as being cruel to animals had significantly ($p<0.001$) higher mean problem and problem-severity scores on the Eyberg Inventory than either clinic children who were not cruel to animals or community children.

Thus, there is substantial evidence for the value of assessing cruelty to animals as a specific symptom of CD and as a correlate of other forms of antisocial behavior in both childhood and adulthood. One additional study will be described to illustrate this conclusion.

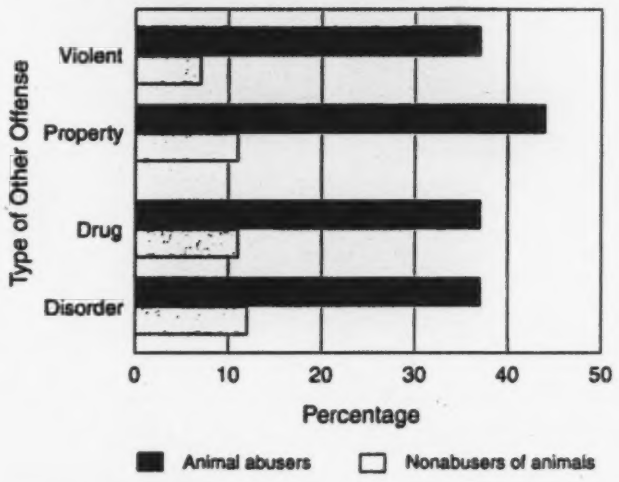
Arluke and colleagues (1999) reviewed the files of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and located the records of 153 individuals (146 males and 7 females, age range 11–76 years) who had been prosecuted for intentional physical cruelty to animals (not passive forms of cruelty such as neglect). A comparison group of 153 individuals (matched for age, gender, and socioeconomic status, but with no record of any cruelty-to-animal complaints) was selected from the same neighborhoods in which those who had been prosecuted resided. The State's criminal records were reviewed for each individual in both groups. Any adult arrests for violent, property, drug, or public order offenses were noted. As shown in figure 5, individuals prosecuted for animal abuse were more likely to have an adult arrest in each of the four crime categories than the comparison group members. The differences between percentages for abusers and nonabusers were highly significant ($p<0.0001$) for all four types of offenses. These results make it clear that animal abusers are not only dangerous to their animal victims but also may jeopardize human welfare.

Motivations That May Underlie Animal Abuse by Children and Adolescents

Whenever high-profile cases of animal abuse are reported in the media, a common public reaction is to ask: "Why would someone do that?" Burying puppies alive, shooting wild mustangs, setting a dog on fire, beating a petting zoo donkey—these and countless other examples offend the public by their seemingly senseless cruelty. In an effort to better understand this phenomenon, Kellert and Felthous (1985: 1122–1124) interviewed abusers and discovered a number of motivations that may characterize adult cruelty to animals, some of which may also be applicable to animal abuse perpetrated by juveniles:

- To control an animal (i.e., animal abuse as discipline or "training").
- To retaliate against an animal.
- To satisfy a prejudice against a species or breed (e.g., hatred of cats).
- To express aggression through an animal (i.e., training an animal to attack, using inflicted pain to create a "mean" dog).
- To enhance one's own aggressiveness (e.g., using an animal victim for target practice).
- To shock people for amusement.
- To retaliate against other people (by hurting their pets or abusing animals in their presence).

Figure 5: Percentage of Types of Other Offenses Committed by Individuals Prosecuted for Animal Abuse and a Control Group Who Did Not Abuse Animals



Note: Age range of sample: 11–76 years. All chi-square comparisons between abusers and nonabusers significant at $p<0.0001$.

Source: Arluke, A., Levin, J., Luke, C., and Ascione, F. 1999. The relationship of animal abuse to violence and other forms of antisocial behavior. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 14:963–975.

- To displace hostility from a person to an animal (i.e., attacking a vulnerable animal when assaulting the real human target is judged too risky).
- To experience nonspecific sadism (i.e., enjoying the suffering experienced by the animal victim, in and of itself).

Child and adolescent motivations for animal abuse have not been studied as extensively. However, case reports and a youth interview study (using the Cruelty to Animals Assessment Instrument) conducted by Ascione, Thompson, and Black (1997) suggest a number of developmentally related motivations:

- Curiosity or exploration (i.e., the animal is injured or killed in the process of being examined, usually by a young or developmentally delayed child).
- Peer pressure (e.g., peers may encourage animal abuse or require it as part of an initiation rite).
- Mood enhancement (e.g., animal abuse is used to relieve boredom or depression).
- Sexual gratification (i.e., bestiality).
- Forced abuse (i.e., the child is coerced into animal abuse by a more powerful individual).
- Attachment to an animal (e.g., the child kills an animal to prevent its torture by another individual).
- Animal phobias (that cause a preemptive attack on a feared animal).
- Identification with the child's abuser (e.g., a victimized child may try to regain a sense of power by victimizing a more vulnerable animal).
- Posttraumatic play (i.e., reenacting violent episodes with an animal victim).
- Imitation (i.e., copying a parent's or other adult's abusive "discipline" of animals).
- Self-injury (i.e., using an animal to inflict injuries on the child's own body).
- Rehearsal for interpersonal violence (i.e., "practicing" violence on stray animals or pets before engaging in violent acts against other people).
- Vehicle for emotional abuse (e.g., injuring a sibling's pet to frighten the sibling).

CD assessments are not usually designed to discover the underlying reasons for a child's or adolescent's cruelty to animals, but as with juvenile firesetting (discussed below), understanding motivations may be critical for designing effective intervention strategies. A recent review by Agnew (1998) provides a more extensive treatment of the social-psychological causes of animal abuse.

As noted by Ascione and Lockwood (2001), one model that could be used to develop an animal abuse assessment instrument is the approach that has been taken to assess juvenile firesetting. Firesetting shares many features with animal abuse: both are CD symptoms, may reflect developmental changes, may share etiological factors, may often be performed covertly, and may be early sentinels for later psychological problems.

Some children may manifest both problem behaviors. Wooden and Berkey (1984) noted the co-occurrence of cruelty to animals in a sample of 69 firesetters ages 4–17: cruelty to animals was reported for 46 percent of 4- to 8-year-olds, 9 percent of 9- to 12-year-olds, and 12 percent of 13- to 17-year-olds. The authors caution that the lower rates for older children and adolescents may be related to the covert nature of this behavior, as children experience greater independence and venture farther from home for more prolonged periods. Sakheim and Osborne (1994) reported similar results with samples of children who set fires (n=100) and those who did not (n=55). Fifty percent of the firesetters' parents reported that their children had been cruel "to children or animals," but only 9 percent of parents of the children who did not set fires reported the same ($p<0.01$).

Animal abuse in the context of firesetting may also have predictive value. Rice and Harris (1996) reported on a sample of 243 firesetters who had resided in a maximum-security psychiatric facility and were later released. In a followup of 208 of these men, Rice and Harris found that a childhood history of cruelty to animals (coded from patient records) predicted violent offense recidivism ($p<0.001$) and nonviolent offense recidivism ($p<0.05$) but not firesetting recidivism.[5]

The Salt Lake City Area Juvenile Firesetter/Arson Control and Prevention Program (1992), funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, is based on a typology of juvenile firesetters that may be relevant for developing a

typology for children who abuse animals (Marcel Chappuis, personal communication, March 23, 1998). The typology of juvenile firesetters categorizes children into the following groups:

- **Normal curiosity firesetters.** The mean age of this group is 5 years (range, 3–7 years). Children in this group often share the characteristics of poor parental supervision, a lack of fire education, and no fear of fire.
- **"Plea-for-help" firesetters.** The mean age of this group is 9 years (range, 7–13 years). The group's firesetting is often symptomatic of more deep-seated psychological disturbance. The individuals usually have had adequate fire education.
- **Delinquent firesetters.** The mean age of this group is 14 years (range, 13 years to adulthood). Firesetting may be one of a host of adolescent-onset antisocial behaviors, including gang-related activities, exhibited by this group.

The Salt Lake City program has developed a series of assessment scales geared to each age group of firesetters that can be administered to the child and the child's parent/guardian. In addition to questions about fire education and the firesetting incident(s), this series has questions about general behavior problems (similar to items on the CBC), including one item about cruelty to animals. (There is also a direct question about whether the firesetting incident involved the burning of an animal.) Responses to these assessments are used to select an intervention strategy. Children who fall into the normal curiosity group are often enrolled in a fire education program, and attempts may be made to educate parents about fire safety and the need for supervising young children. Children who fall into the other two groups are referred to mental health services because fire departments are not prepared to deal with the psychological problems these young people may present.

It might be possible to develop a similar typology for children who abuse animals. Although there is not a great deal of empirical information on which to rely, the study by Ascione, Thompson, and Black (1997) suggests the varied motivations that may underlie child and adolescent animal abuse. Using the extensive experience of animal control and animal welfare professionals, one could develop a typology mirroring that for juvenile firesetters. A sketch of such a typology might approximate the following:

- **Exploratory/curious animal abuse.** Children in this category are likely to be of preschool or early elementary school age, poorly supervised, and lacking training on the physical care and humane treatment of a variety of animals, especially family pets and/or stray animals and neighborhood wildlife. Humane education interventions (teaching children to be kind, caring, and nurturing toward animals) by parents, childcare providers, and teachers are likely to be sufficient to encourage desistence of animal abuse in these children. Age alone should not be the determining factor in including children in this category. For example, CD symptoms may have an early developmental onset, and as noted earlier, cruelty to animals is one of the earliest CD symptoms to be noted by caretakers. Older children who are developmentally delayed may also fall into this group.
- **Pathological animal abuse.** Children in this category are more likely to be (though not necessarily) older than children in the exploratory/curious group. Rather than indicating a lack of education about the humane treatment of animals, animal abuse by these children may be symptomatic of psychological disturbances of varying severity. For example, a number of studies have tied childhood animal abuse to childhood histories of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and exposure to domestic violence (see pages 8–9 for discussions of these issues). In these cases, professional, clinical intervention is warranted.
- **Delinquent animal abuse.** Youth in this category are most likely to be adolescents whose animal abuse may be one of a number of antisocial activities. In some cases, the animal abuse may be a component of gang/cult-related activities (e.g., initiation rites) or less formal group violence and destructiveness. The use of alcohol and other substances may be associated with animal abuse for these youth, and they may require both judicial and clinical interventions.

The Etiology of Animal Abuse

Although "bad seed" interpretations of youth violence have waxed and waned throughout history (Garbarino, 1999; Kellerman, 1999), it is clear that attention to the family, social, and community contexts of children's lives is critical for understanding violent behavior. This holds true for the special case of animal abuse. As Widom (1989) has demonstrated, a history of child abuse and neglect places individuals at risk for later delinquency, adult criminal offending, and violent criminal activity. This section addresses factors in children's lives that have been associated with increased levels of animal abuse. The factors range from negative but relatively normative experiences (corporal punishment) to potentially more devastating circumstances (physical abuse, sexual abuse, and domestic violence).

Corporal Punishment

Evidence continues to mount on the ineffectiveness and deleterious nature of corporal punishment as a child-rearing technique (Straus, 1991). Two recent studies link this evidence to animal abuse. In a survey of 267 undergraduates, 68.4 percent

of whom were women, Flynn (1999a) asked participants about their history of abusing animals (e.g., hurting, torturing, or killing pets or stray animals; sex acts with animals). Students also responded to items assessing attitudes toward spanking and husband-on-wife abuse. In all, 34.5 percent of the men and 9.3 percent of the women reported at least one childhood incident of animal abuse. These respondents (both men and women) were significantly more likely to endorse the use of corporal punishment and to approve of a husband slapping his wife. Although these findings do not establish a direct link between abusing animals and spanking children or slapping wives, they do suggest an association between animal abuse and accepting attitudes toward these activities.

In a followup report with this same sample of undergraduates, Flynn (1999b) found that, for men, perpetrating animal abuse was positively correlated with the frequency of their father's use of corporal punishment (spanking, slapping, or hitting) in adolescence. Self-reports of animal abuse by men experiencing paternal corporal punishment in adolescence were 2.4 times higher than for men who were not physically disciplined (57.1 percent and 23.1 percent, respectively, $p<0.005$).

Physical Abuse

Research specifically designed to assess the relation between animal abuse and child maltreatment is meager yet compelling in its implications. For example, a 1983 study by DeViney, Dickert, and Lockwood of 53 New Jersey families that met State criteria for substantiated child abuse and neglect and had pets in their homes revealed that in 60 percent of these families, pets were also abused or neglected. Animal abuse was significantly higher (88 percent) in families where child physical abuse was present than in families where other forms of child maltreatment (e.g., sexual abuse) occurred (34 percent). One or both parents and their children were responsible for abusing the families' pets.

Sexual Abuse

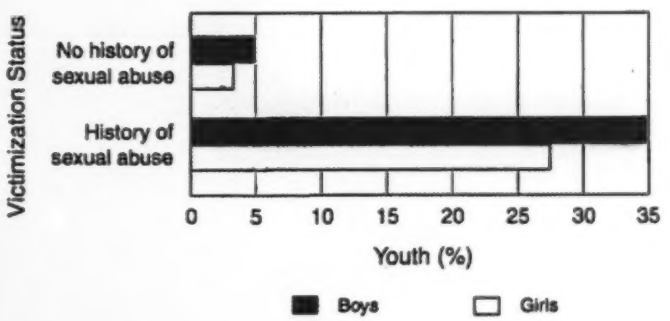
Friedrich et al. (1992) compared a nonabused sample of 880 children ages 2–12 with 276 children in the same age range who had been sexually abused in the past 12 months. Based on a reexamination of data from this study, Friedrich (personal communication, April 1992) provided information on cruelty to animals derived from the nonperpetrating caretakers' CBC reports on children. As shown in figure 6, children with a history of sexual abuse were significantly ($p<0.001$) more likely to have been cruel to animals than children in the nonabused group. A study of 499 seriously mentally ill 5- to 18-year-olds hospitalized at a tertiary care psychiatric facility (McClellan et al., 1995) also found cruelty to animals to be more prevalent among patients who had been sexually abused than among those who had not been sexually abused ($p=0.004$).

One form of cruelty to animals that has received scant attention in the literature is the sexual abuse of animals, or bestiality. Bestiality may range from touching or fondling the genitals of animals to sexual intercourse and violent sexual abuse. Some species of animals may be seriously injured or die as a result of the abuse inflicted (e.g., penetration that damages internal organs). Beirne (1997) provided an excellent theoretical overview of this issue, but empirical studies, especially with children, are rare (e.g., see case study by Wiegand, Schmidt, and Kleiber, 1999). Lane (1997) noted that juvenile sex offending may include bestiality, sometimes combined with other violent behavior toward animals. Adolescent sexual offenders may also use threats of harm to pets as a way of gaining compliance from their human victims (Kaufman, Hilliker, and Daleiden, 1996). In the study of sexual homicide perpetrators cited earlier (Ressler, Burgess, and Douglas, 1988), 40 percent of the men who said they had been sexually abused in childhood or adolescence reported having sexual contact with animals. Itzin (1998) reported anecdotal evidence of bestiality being forced on children who also were sexually abused and involved in the production of child pornography.

Although it is difficult to obtain information about sexual behavior in children and adolescents, especially sexual behavior with animals, Friedrich (1997) provided some information on this issue with data from his Child Sexual Behavior Inventory (CSBI). Caregivers of 1,114 children ages 2–12 who had not been abused and caregivers of 512 sexually abused children in the same age range reported on a variety of sexual or sexualized behaviors in the children, including whether the child "touches animals' sex parts." (Note: The reporting caregivers of the sexually abused children were not the perpetrators of the abuse.) The children were divided into three age groups: ages 2–5, 6–9, and 10–12. The queried behavior was relatively infrequent, but it was clear that in the two older groups, sexually abused children were more likely to display the behavior than nonabused children (see figure 7). Although the behavior appears to decline among sexually abused 10- to 12-year-olds, one might speculate that the decrease is accounted for, in part, by a greater secretiveness in older children in acting out sexually with animals. The decrease may also be related to older children's transferring their inappropriate sexual activity from animal to human victims.

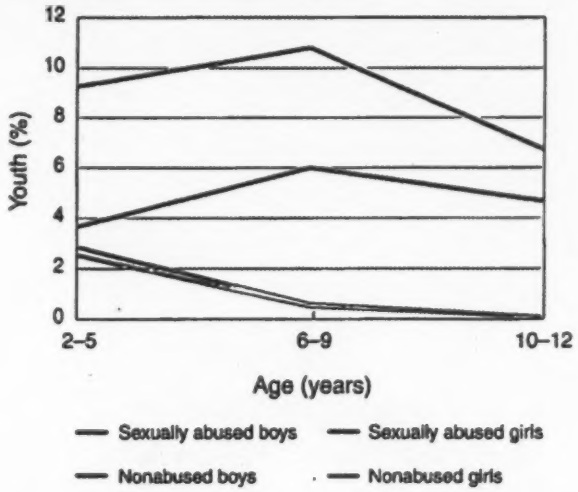
Further evidence for the relation between sexual abuse victimization and bestiality is

Figure 6: Percentage of Youth Ages 2–12 Reported by Caregivers To Have Been Cruel to Animals, by Offender's Gender and History of Sexual Abuse



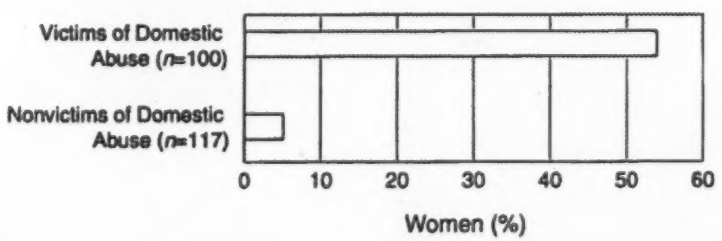
Source: Friedrich, W.N., personal communication, April 1992.

Figure 7: Percentage of Youth Ages 2–12 Reported by Caregivers To Have Sexually Abused Animals, by Offender's Age, Gender, and Victimization Status



Source: Friedrich, W.N. 1997. *Child Sexual Behavior Inventory: Professional Manual.* Odessa, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources.

Figure 8: Percentage of Women Who Reported That Their Domestic Partners Hurt or Killed Pets, by Reporter's History of Domestic Abuse



Source: Ascione, F.R. 2000b. What veterinarians need to know about the link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence. Proceedings of the 137th Annual Meeting of the American Veterinary Medical Association, Salt Lake City, UT, July 25, 2000 (CD–ROM records #316–317).

provided by Wherry and colleagues (1995). They administered the CSBI to caretakers of 24 boys ages 6–12 who were psychiatric inpatients. Eight of these boys had been sexually abused. "Touches animals' sex parts" was reported for 50 percent of abused boys but none of nonabused boys ($p<0.01$).

Domestic Violence

Animals may also be abused in the context of family violence between intimate adult partners. Ascione (1998) reported an interview study of 38 women who were battered and had sought shelter. Fifty-eight percent of the women had children and 74 percent had pets. When asked whether their adult partner had ever threatened or actually hurt or killed one or more of their pets, 71 percent of women with pets responded "yes." Thirty-two percent of women with children reported that their children had hurt or killed one or more family pets. In a replication study of 100 women who were battered and had entered a shelter and a comparison group of 117 nonbattered women, all of whom had pets, Ascione (2000b) found that 54 percent of the battered women compared with 5 percent of the nonbattered women reported that their partner had hurt or killed pets (see figure 8). Children's exposure to this animal abuse was reported by 62 percent of the battered women. Nearly one in four of the battered women reported that concern for their pets' welfare had prevented them from seeking shelter sooner.[4]

Flynn (2000) reported similar findings in a study of 43 women with pets who had entered a South Carolina domestic violence shelter. (Twenty-eight of the women were accompanied by children.) Of these 43 women, 46.5 percent reported threats to ($n=9$) or harm of ($n=11$) their pets. Although only 7 percent of children were reported to be cruel to animals, 33.3 percent of women whose pets were abused reported that their children had also been abused. Of the women whose pets were not abused, 15.8 percent reported child abuse. (The figure was 10.5 percent for women with no pets.)

These studies make it clear that in families challenged by child maltreatment and domestic violence, there is increased opportunity for children to be exposed to the abuse of animals. Even if adult family members do not abuse animals, some children may express the pain of their own victimization by abusing vulnerable family pets. Just as researchers are beginning to understand the overlap between child abuse and neglect and domestic violence between intimate adult partners (Ross, 1996), they must now consider the overlap of these forms of abuse with animal maltreatment (see figure 9).

Policy Implications and Recommendations

This section addresses issues relating to the reporting, assessment, and treatment of children involved in animal abuse. It presents recommendations associated with these issues and highlights the need for enhanced professional training.

Figure 9: Interconnectedness of Different Types of Abuse

Source: Ascione, F.R., and Arkow, P., eds. 1999. *Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse: Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention.* West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

Reporting

Cruelty to animals is all too often a part of the landscape of violence in which youth participate and to which they are exposed. The number of animals that are victims of such abuse is, at present, difficult to estimate, as is the number of young people who perpetrate such abuse. In an ideal world, national data would be available on the yearly incidence of animal abuse, data that could be used to track trends and serve as a baseline against which the effectiveness of interventions could be assessed. The existing national data collection systems in the area of child abuse and neglect illustrate the value of such archival records (Sedlak and Broadhurst, 1996). However, it is not clear how animal abuse offenses could be incorporated into the existing categorization (person, property, drug, public order) of juvenile arrests.

Only two States (Minnesota and West Virginia) mandate that veterinarians report suspected cases of animal abuse (Frasch et al., 1999). Until a national system of monitoring and reporting animal abuse is instituted, the following approaches to recording cases of animal abuse are recommended:

- Local humane societies, societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, and animal control agencies should routinely refer cases of serious, juvenile- and adult-perpetrated animal abuse to social welfare and law enforcement agencies and should maintain systematic records that could be available for archival review (Ascione and Barnard, 1998; Ascione, Kaufmann, and Brooks, 2000).
- Parents, childcare providers, teachers, others who play caregiving roles for children (e.g., clergy, coaches), and young people themselves should be informed that animal abuse may be a significant sign of a tendency to violence and psychological disturbance and should not be ignored. Efforts in this area are already emerging and include *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools* (Dwyer, Osher, and Warger, 1998) from the U.S. Department of Education and the *Warning Signs* guide (1999) developed by MTV-Music Television™ and the American Psychological Association and disseminated as part of their Fight for Your Rights: Take a Stand Against Violence campaign. The American Humane Association's (1996) *Growing Up Humane in a Violent World: A Parent's Guide* provides developmentally sensitive information about children and animals and the significance of animal abuse. The *Guide* also includes educational strategies appropriate for preschoolers and some designed for elementary and secondary school students.
- Youth should be surveyed about their treatment of animals. Because animals may often be abused covertly, parents and other adults may not be the best sources of information about this behavior problem. To obtain a better estimate of the incidence of animal abuse, youth surveys of violent behavior should include self-report items such as "Have you hurt an animal on purpose?" or "Have you made an animal suffer for no reason?" Also, witnessing animal abuse is a form of exposure to violence that should be routinely assessed because it may have significant effects on young people (Boat, 1999). Often children are deeply attached to their pets and observing the violent abuse or death of a pet at the hands of others may be emotionally devastating.

Assessment and Treatment

As part of the search for effective youth violence prevention and intervention programs, animal welfare organizations have been developing educational and therapeutic efforts that incorporate "animal-assisted" or "animal-facilitated" components (Duel, 2000). The underlying theme of many of these programs is that teaching young people to train, care for, and interact in a nurturing manner with animals will reduce any propensity they may have for aggression and violence. These programs assume that children are more likely to commit animal abuse when their capacity for empathy has been undermined or compromised (for example, by years of neglect or maltreatment—see Bavolek, 2000). Developing a sense of empathy for animals is assumed to be a bridge to greater empathy for fellow human beings, making violence toward them less likely.

The development of animal abuse assessment and intervention programs is accompanied by a number of issues related to evaluation and accountability:

- Although formal protocols for the clinical assessment (Lewchanin and Zimmerman, 2000) and treatment (Jory and Randour, 1999; Zimmerman and Lewchanin, 2000) of animal abuse are beginning to emerge, they are still at a formative stage of development and their effectiveness is difficult to evaluate.
- Attempts have been made to create typologies for perpetrators of animal abuse, similar to typologies for firesetters. These typologies have intuitive appeal, but their utility has not been empirically assessed. Whether using the proposed categories of animal abusers can facilitate the selection of appropriate therapeutic interventions remains to be determined.
- Given the challenges of incorporating animals into the therapeutic process (Fine, 2000), evaluation of animal-facilitated therapy programs must move beyond anecdotal evidence. Katcher and Wilkins (2000) provided an evaluation model in a study of animal-facilitated therapy for children with attention disorders. The model should be expanded to programs for youth with CD.
- Evaluation of intervention effectiveness will continue to grow in importance because, in some jurisdictions (e.g., California, Colorado), courts may recommend or mandate assessment and treatment of individuals convicted of certain forms of animal abuse (Frasch et al., 1999). The effects of such programs on recidivism have not been examined.

Training

Educational programs at both the preprofessional and professional levels should give greater emphasis to training about animal abuse and its overlap with other forms of family and community violence. This effort has already emerged in veterinary education (Ascione and Barnard, 1998), the legal profession (Davidson, 1998), and law enforcement (Lockwood, 1989) and should be expanded to include mental health (psychology and psychiatry) and other human health professions (e.g., social work, child welfare, and pediatrics) and elementary and secondary education. The following are recommendations for improving and expanding professional training concerning animal abuse:

- Professional cross training should be expanded (Ascione, Kaufmann, and Brooks, 2000). For example, animal control officers should be trained to identify signs of child maltreatment and child protection workers should be trained to identify animal abuse. The underlying theme of such training should be that animal abuse is a significant form of violence that not only harms animals but may be a warning sign of a child who is psychologically disturbed or in danger of maltreatment.
- Training and continuing education for judges should include current information on the associations among animal abuse, domestic violence, and child maltreatment. Decisions about child custody and foster placements should be informed by research showing that adults who abuse animals are potentially dangerous to humans.
- Cross training could also enhance the success of foster placements for maltreated children who may be physically or sexually abusing animals. Foster care providers, especially those with family pets, should be alerted to the potential for animal abuse to occur.

Conclusion

Although vandalism may represent costly and psychologically significant destructiveness (Goldstein, 1996), smashed windshields and graffitied walls do not feel pain or cry out when they are damaged. Animals, however, do express their distress when they have been abused, and their distress calls out for attention. This Bulletin has provided an overview of the underreported and understudied phenomenon of animal abuse in childhood and adolescence. Addressing cruelty to animals as a significant form of aggressive and antisocial behavior may add one more piece to the puzzle of understanding and preventing youth violence.

Resources

The American Humane Association
63 Inverness Drive East
Englewood, CO 80112-5117
303-792-9900
303-792-5333 (fax)
www.americanhumane.org

The National Resource Center on the Link Between Violence to People and Animals
63 Inverness Drive East
Englewood, CO 80112-5117
877-LINK-222 (877-546-5222)
link@americanhumane.org

The American Humane Association (AHA), established in 1877, includes both child protection and animal protection divisions. AHA operates the National Resource Center on the Link Between Violence to People and Animals, provides training to professional groups across the country, and has brochures, fact sheets, and special issues of *Protecting Children* available that are devoted to this topic.

The Humane Society of the United States
First Strike™ Campaign
2100 L Street NW.
Washington, DC 20037
202-452-1100
888-213-0956
www.hsus.org/firststrike/

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) launched the First Strike™ Campaign in 1997 to raise public and professional awareness about the connection between animal abuse and human violence. The campaign provides training for law enforcement officers, prosecutors, social service workers, veterinarians, mental health professionals, educators, and the general public on the importance of treating animal abuse as a serious crime and an indicator of other forms of violence. A complete list of resources available through the HSUS First Strike™ Campaign is available at the Web site and can also be obtained by calling the toll-free number (both listed above). Resources include a free campaign kit with brochures and fact sheets. A general brochure, a brochure on domestic violence, and a brochure for children are available in Spanish. Also available are the First Strike™ Campaign video and public service announcements,

articles addressing the connection between animal abuse and human violence, and *Violence Prevention and Intervention: A Directory of Animal-Related Programs* (Duel, 2000), an 82-page listing of prevention and intervention programs.

The Latham Foundation for the Promotion of Humane Education
1826 Clement Avenue
Alameda, CA 94501
510–521–0920
510–521–9861 (fax)
www.latham.org

Established in 1918, the Latham Foundation promotes respect for all life through education. The Foundation publishes a quarterly periodical, *The Latham Letter*, and maintains a number of print and video resources related to animal abuse, child maltreatment, and humane education, including:

- *Breaking the Cycles of Violence: A Video and Training Manual* (set). Authored by Phil Arkow, the video and 64-page manual are ideal for cross training professionals on animal and human abuse issues.
- *Teaching Compassion: A Guide for Humane Educators.* Written by Pamela Raphael with Libby Coleman, Ph.D., and Lynn Loar, Ph.D., this 130-page guide includes a teacher's narrative and lesson plans to encourage respect, responsibility, compassion, and empathy.
- *Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse: Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention.* Produced with the assistance of the Latham Foundation, this book, edited by Frank R. Ascione, Ph.D., and Phil Arkow (1999), includes original chapters written by authorities from each of these three areas of professional focus.
- *Safe Havens for Pets: Guidelines for Programs Sheltering Pets for Women Who Are Battered.* Based on indepth interviews with 41 domestic violence and animal welfare agencies, this book describes the development and operation of programs that shelter pets for women and their children who are escaping violent homes. A free copy of this book is available for any law enforcement, domestic violence, animal welfare, child welfare, or related agency making a request (funded by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation).

Send a self-adhesive, self-addressed mailing label to:

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Endnotes

1. In 1997, there were 136,000 arrests of persons under age 18 for vandalism (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999); during the 1990–99 reporting period, juvenile arrests for vandalism decreased for boys but increased for girls (Snyder, 2000).

2. Of the 299 inmates, 16 percent were female and 11.9 percent were ages 15 to 19 (the remaining 88.1 percent were older than 19). Of the 308 undergraduates, 57.1 percent were female.

3. Kazdin and Esveldt-Dawson reported that responses to the cruelty to animals item were positively correlated (r=0.46, p<0.001) with the IAB total score. Cruelty to animals scores were significantly higher for CD-diagnosed than for non-CD-diagnosed boys and girls, ages 6–13, who were inpatients at a psychiatric facility (F[1,256] = 8.44, p<0.01).

4. Randolf (1999) suggested that cruelty to animals also may be one of the core symptoms of attachment disorders (see also Magid and McKelvey, 1987).

5. It is interesting to note that enuresis (bedwetting) was not significantly related to any of the three forms of recidivism. Bedwetting has been included in the so-called "triad" of symptoms (with cruelty to animals and firesetting) as a possible predictor of serious violence. Research has been inconclusive about the triad's predictive value (Barnett and Spitzer, 1994; Lockwood and Ascione, 1998:245–246).

6. Thus, some domestic violence victims and their children may remain with a batterer because they have no one to care for their pets if the victim and children enter a domestic violence shelter. In response, programs to shelter pets of domestic violence victims have been and continue to be established across the United States and Canada (Ascione, 2000a). The increasing availability of these pet-sheltering programs will benefit battered women and their children because helping mothers achieve safety may be one of the best ways to ensure the safety of their children (Jacobsen, 2000).

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